

Biblical Counseling

Week 10 2025-2026

ACBC Theology Exam –

10. Provide a biblical description of the dichotomist view of mankind. Explain the counseling implications of this doctrine with regard to the inner and outer man.

18. Describe the doctrine of Union with Christ explaining its biblical basis and implications for Christian living.

Genesis 2:7 –

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

I. Humans are comprised of two substances: Material and Immortal

Genesis 1:26–27 - God created mankind distinct from all the other creatures. Scripture clearly teaches that man is intended to experience intimate relationship with God, and, therefore, He created us as a unity of both material (physical) and immaterial (spiritual) aspects (Eccl. 12:7, Matt. 10:28, 1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 4:16; 7:1, James 2:26).

The material component of humans is that which is tangible and temporal: the physical body. This is transformed at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

The immaterial aspects are intangible: soul, spirit, intellect, will, conscience, mind, emotions, etc. These exist unendingly beyond the lifespan of the physical body.

Man is a unified being/complex entity – cannot separate the material from the immaterial.

II. Created in God's Image

The material and immaterial parts of man are interwoven, but not static. The physical cannot change. One head, two hands, two legs, warm-blooded etc. It has a life expectancy that may or may not exceed the average. We can expect no great changes in the physical from generation to generation.

The immaterial part of man is subject to change; although not of its own volition. The natural inclination of the fallen individual is a physical body that is dying combined with a spiritual nature that is already dead (Eph. 2:1). The new birth is able to transform the immaterial part of man to a living, dynamic state contrary to its sinful inception.

The human body, the material, was designed to have harmony with the immaterial. (Gen. 1:26).

Sin corrupted both the material and immaterial parts of man and ushered in disharmony. That

harmony is restored imperfectly through the new birth; a still fallen body but a new spirit. The harmony is perfected in glory when the new body is united with the new spirit, restoring the perfection of the garden.

Anthony Hoekema *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986)

III. Dichotomy and Trichotomy are two frameworks that refer to understanding the composition of human beings.

Both views seek to clarify how Scripture portrays our nature, highlighting whether we are made up of two or three separate components.

Trichotomy distinguishes body, soul, AND spirit.

Dichotomy groups soul and spirit as one immaterial essence partnering with the physical body.

Both views find support in various biblical texts, and Christian scholarship recognizes that neither interpretation impairs core doctrines about salvation, the integrity of Scripture, or our accountability to God.

Human nature is more than merely physical. Each believer is accountable to God in every aspect of life - material and immaterial. Humans are created in God's image and intended for fellowship with Him (Genesis 1:27). In that fellowship, God transforms the entirety of who we are – body and soul/spirit-to the praise of His glory.

IV. Trichotomy - Humans consist of three parts: body, soul, AND spirit.

1. Body - This is the tangible, physical, material component.

2. Soul - The seat of our mind, will, and emotions. It encompasses personal identity, consciousness, and the center of our personality (Psalm 139:14).

3. Spirit - Spirit is distinct from the soul and primarily relates to communion with God.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 - “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your entire spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Hebrews 4:12 - “*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart*”.

V. Dichotomy - Humans consist of two parts: a material component (body) and an immaterial component (soul/spirit).

1. Body - The body remains the physical form fashioned from the dust (Genesis 2:7). It is finite and destined for resurrection according to Scripture's promises (Philippians 3:21).

2. Soul/Spirit - “Soul” and “spirit” are interchangeable terms in Scripture, both referring to the single immaterial essence. “Spirit” and “soul” are used in parallel senses (for example, Luke 1:46-47, where Mary magnifies the Lord in her soul and rejoices in her spirit, without implying two separate immaterial parts).

Humans have one immaterial nature, living in fellowship with God, shaped by conscience, intellect, and emotions.

VI. Proof Biblical Passages and Interpretations

1. Genesis 2:7 - *“Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.”*

- Trichotomy: Argues that “living being” (or “living soul”) implies a key distinction from a breath/spirit imparted by God.
- Dichotomy: Emphasizes that humanity receives one immaterial aspect-God breathed life-and thus man became a single person with a body and soul/spirit.

2. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 - *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your entire spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless...”*

- Trichotomy: Typically cited as primary evidence of a threefold composition.
- Dichotomy: Sees the verse as either a flourish highlighting the fullness of human nature or as a stylistic emphasis rather than a technical distinction of different components.

3. Hebrews 4:12 - *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow...”*

- Trichotomy: Soul and spirit are individually addressed in this passage, supporting a three-part view.
- Dichotomy: Argues that the passage highlights God’s ability to probe the deepest aspects of the immaterial life rather than suggesting two separate immaterial entities.

VII. Dichotomy has the strongest Scriptural support

Soul and spirit are the same/interchangeable entity – (soul – *psyche*) (spirit – *pneuma*)

John 12:27 (soul – *psyche*) *“Now My soul has become troubled; and what am I to say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose, I came to this hour.”*

John 13:21 (spirit – *pneuma*) – *“When Jesus had said these things, He became troubled in spirit,”*

John uses soul (12:27) interchangeably with spirit (13:21). Jesus is not saying My soul is troubled in 12:27, but not My Spirit. Jesus is not saying My spirit is troubled in 13:21, but not My soul!

Heb 12:23 – (spirits – *pneuma*) “*to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,*”

Rev 6:9 – (souls – *psyche*) “*When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.*”

At death, Scripture says either that the “soul” departs, or the “spirit” departs. (Gen 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21; Is. 53:12; Luke 12:20)

Scripture nowhere says that a person’s “soul and spirit” departed or went to heaven or were yielded up to God.

Therefore, the dichotomist view seems best: “spirit” and “soul” are just different words for the same thing, the non-material part of our existence.

VIII. Practical Implications for Believers

1. Unity of the Human Person - Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that humans are holistic beings, called to love God with all heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

2. Biblical Counseling and Ministry - The focus is on the importance of understanding a believer’s inner life to holistically address spiritual growth, emotional well-being, and bodily stewardship.

3. Worship and Devotion - Scripture calls for worship in “spirit and truth” (John 4:24). There is a depth of communion with God, which serves as the locus for true worship, sanctification, and fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

IX. Counseling Implications from dichotomy to the inner and outer man.

Scripture Uses “Soul” and “Spirit” Interchangeably. The emphasis of Scripture on the overall unity of man. Gen. 2:7 - *Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person.*

Man is a complex whole. MacArthur - Complex Unity

We are to grow in holiness and love for God in our bodies as well as spirits or souls (2 Cor. 7:1).

Man cannot be separated into his two parts (in this life).

Attempts to divide man into his two parts and to allocate them for care and analysis will fail.

The material body affects the immaterial soul/spirit and the soul/spirit, the body. This is obvious in many cases and more subtle in others and we must always remember this fact. Cannot treat the body without consideration of the soul/spirit and vice versa.

This becomes one of our presuppositions - man is made of two parts but is a complex unity which cannot be separated or neglected in counseling.

The biblical counselor must constantly consider and involve the material in counseling consideration.

PDI asks about current physical health matters and condition; most recent checkup and results; previous major illnesses and chronic physical conditions, current medication.

PDI asks about current or past severe emotional incidents; asks faith identification and affirming questions.

PDI asks about outer man considerations (physical health, fitness, manifestations). May need to ask them to see a doctor for a check up

PDI asks about inner man considerations (moods, thoughts, emotions, beliefs).

In counseling, ask questions concerning health and physical wellbeing (sleep habits, eating, exercise, alcohol and drug use).

Lack of sleep, poor diet, poor fitness, negligent grooming affect the person's heart and mind.

Stress, anxiety, depression in the heart affect the body causing lack of sleep, over/under eating, lack of exercise – downward spiral

Biblical counseling considers the unity of man, the inner and outer man. We are after heart change – inner man, because from the heart flow the wellspring of life (Prov. 4:23).

We are not only after behavior modification (external) without modifying the heart (internal). Biblical counseling seeks to help with heart change to transform the inner and outer man in thoughts, words, and deeds (Eph. 4:22-24 and Rom. 12:1-2).

18. Describe the doctrine of Union with Christ explaining its biblical basis and implications for Christian living.

I. Union with Christ is one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith and is a basic dimension of the doctrine of salvation. By being identified with Christ in His atoning death as well as in His resurrection power, believers are credited with His righteousness and share in His holiness.

The vital union that believers have with Jesus Christ makes them recipients of all the spiritual

blessings that are found in Him as the Mediator and Redeemer of the elect – the Father’s election in eternity past; the Son’s redemptive life, death, burial, and resurrection; and the glorification of the saints with Christ in heaven (Romans 1; Ephesians 1; Colossians 3).

Believers are intimately identified with Christ and He with them, Scriptures say they are united – He is in them, and they are in Him. Our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3); that Christ is Himself our life (Col. 3:4); and Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:20).

The NT Epistles allude to union with Christ in some manner of speaking more than two hundred times (“in Christ”, “in the Lord”, “in Christ Jesus”, and “in Him”). Paul’s favorite designation:

1 Corinthians 12:2 - *“I know a man in Christ”.*

Galatians 2:20–21 - *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.*

II. Scripture reveals believers are joined to Christ:

We are the branches, and Jesus is the vine (John 15:5).

Jesus is the head, and we are His body (1 Cor. 6:15–19).

Christ is the foundation, and we are living stones joined to the foundation (1 Peter 2:4–5).

Marriage between a husband and wife ultimately points to the union between Christ and believers (Eph. 5:25–31).

United to Christ by faith, believers lay hold of Christ’s righteousness (Phil. 3:9), and are justified in Him (Gal. 2:17), for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Thus, declared righteous in Christ, believers are adopted into the family of God through Christ (Eph. 1:5; Gal. 3:26), and are sanctified in Him for holiness and service to God (1 Cor. 1:2).

God’s Word teaches us that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and that we are united to Christ by God’s justifying grace alone through our faith alone because of the atoning death of Christ alone (John 15:4–7; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 12:2; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 1:4; 2:10; Phil. 3:9; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 John 4:13).

III. The nature of this union is not only that we are in Christ but that He is in us (John 6:56; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27).

Jesus said: *“Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:4-5).

Union with Christ is the source for progressive sanctification and perseverance. Christ is called our sanctification because it flows from Him (1 Cor. 1:30). We bring forth the fruit of righteousness only as we stay connected to our vine (John 15:4-5).

Increasing in holiness is impossible apart from union with Christ. It is the basis of this union that true believers always persevere until the end (Jn 10:27-28). In Christ, nothing can separate us from the Father's love (Rom. 8:38-39). Not even death severs this union, for Christians who die are called the dead in Christ (1 Thess. 4:14,16) and are present with Him (2 Cor. 5:9).

Believer's union with Christ encompasses every step of salvation, from election in eternity past to glorification in eternity future. Those whom God has chosen, whom Christ has purchased, and to whom the Spirit gives life are never contemplated apart from their union with Christ.

IV. The Holy Spirit unites individuals to Christ and to the body of Christ.

Every believer becomes a true descendant by virtue of this union. Scripture calls the new covenant church the "body" and "bride" of Christ on account of this union.

"The union between Christ and the church is as close as that between the vine and the branches, between bridegroom and bride, husband and wife, cornerstone and building. Together with him it can be called the one Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). Just as through his suffering and death Christ was exalted in his resurrection and ascension to be head of the church, so now the church has to be formed into the body of Christ." Herman Bavinck

The result of this union between Christ and His church is that the individual members of His body are united to one another and have a mutual communion and fellowship with the triune God and all other believers. This communion is strengthened by a continual use of the means of grace —especially in the Lord's Supper as believers jointly feed on Christ by faith.

V. MacArthur Biblical Doctrine

Union with Christ – Five Characteristics of the Believer's Union with Christ

Organic union - Christ and believers form one body of which he is the head, and they are members thus what is true of the head is true of the body.

Legal union - Christ to be the representative head of his people and fitting them to be the beneficiary of the substitutionary work of salvation.

Vital union - All spiritual life and vitality flows from the vine to the branches, such that the life of Christ becomes the dominating and animating principle of believer's lives (Gal. 2:20).

Spiritual union - spiritual life is communicated to and strengthened within the believer and this union has its source in and is mediated by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8: 9-10); 1st Cor. (12:13); John 14:17-18).

Permanent union - Can never be severed, as nothing can separate us from the love of God which is ours in union with Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

VII. Union with Christ – Implications

Since the Son is united to the Father and to the Spirit, believers, by their participation in Christ, are also made one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Christians are swept up into the divine life of the triune God Himself (2 Peter 1:4).

Those who are one with Christ are also one with everyone else who is one with Christ and is the fundamental unity of all believers in Christ. We not only have a personal relationship with Jesus, but a corporate relationship with Christ, for we are united to all who are united to Him. We are the unified members of his body (Romans 12:5; 1st Cor. 12:26: Eph. 5:23). A Christian cannot be united to Christ apart from his church - that is to tear the head from the body. No union with Christ that does not issue in fellowship with his church (1st Corinthians 1:9; 1st John 1:3).

Every spiritual benefit received in salvation comes only through Christ: adoption, justification, sanctification, fruitfulness, perseverance, resurrection, and glory is only received as we share in Christ. No spiritual blessings in all the world is found anywhere but in Jesus.

VIII. Union with Christ and implications for Christian living.

Christians have been justified, regenerated, and positionally sanctified – their guilt has been taken away, they are new creatures, and they have been set apart for Christ, Christ's righteousness has been imputed in them, made holy and placed on a trajectory for transformation to Christlikeness. Therefore, they may 'DO' and are expected to be able to "DO" Colossians 3:1-3 – "*Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*" Col. 3:5 – "*Therefore, treat the parts of your earthly body as dead to....*" Col. 3:8 - "*But now you also, rid yourselves of all of them:....*" Col. 3:12 – "*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of....*"

Union with Christ means every aspect of our being can change by the power of Christ in us. Counselors and counselees must have an expectation for change and by our faithfulness and trust in Christ, we can and must change – (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

IX. Union with Christ and implications for Christian living (cont.).

The Christian's freedom from the dominion of sin through union with Christ is the necessary foundation for all progress in progressive sanctification.

Romans 6:1-8 - Through union with Christ, the believer is set free from the dominion of sin. The Christian is free from sin's penalty because of Christ's imputed righteousness. Initial sanctification grants him freedom from sin's power. Believers died to sin by virtue of their union

with Christ in His death and resurrection. Our old self was crucified with Christ in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

It is only because we are united to Him in His death and resurrection by the grace of God that the believer can make any progress in practical holiness. The believer can live a life of faithful obedience on the sole basis that he has really been crucified with Christ and that Christ now really lives in him (Gal. 2:20).

Any attempt at morally improving oneself apart from the working of God's supernatural grace bestowed through the believer's union with Christ is a man-made counterfeit of sanctification that finds no favor with God and is ultimately ineffective.

Believers in Christ can be victorious over sin only because – and must be victorious over sin precisely because – Christ has conquered sin in them by virtue of His death and resurrection.

Counseling Implications –

- Help our counselees realize the hope they have to grow in Christ. They can expect to grow in Christ because every spiritual blessing is given to us in Christ Jesus. A spiritual blessings is sanctification. Union with Christ not only brings the possibility for change but also the expectation of change.

We can expect to change because, in union with Christ, we are free from sin's slavery. We have died and risen with Christ "so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6). Every believer is free to choose not to sin and to walk in righteousness.

- A great hope for counselees is that all believers are on equal ground. The moment a person believes in Christ, he is given everything he needs in Christ to be saved and to live in a way that glorifies him.

- For the counselor, the doctrine of union with Christ means that we must tie our counsel to the person and work of Christ to avoid legalistic rule-giving. We want to avoid counsel that is detached from the life-giving union that we have in Christ. While we seek to speak the truth in love, we must remember that it is from him that the body grows up and matures (Eph. 4:15-16).

Counsel devoid of Christ may sound like wisdom, but it does not truly help people grow up into his image (Colossians 2:23).

- Counselors must constantly tie counsel to Christ to demonstrate that God is the one who sanctifies his people by the Holy Spirit. Our counselees need to be reminded that their fruit-bearing comes through their attachment to the vine, not their association with us as counselors. We must help others find in Christ their source of hope, transformation, and assurance

References.

10. Provide a biblical description of the dichotomist view of mankind. Explain the counseling implications of this doctrine with regard to the inner and outer man.

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John MacArthur *Biblical Doctrine* Crossway, 2017

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* Zondervan, 1994

Ligonier - <https://learn.ligonier.org/guides/union-with-christ>

Kyle Gangel - <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/union-with-christ-our-hope/?srsltid=AfmBOoobFp8WrWwrIkQ8JwGqGSMM-CjPJQzY-ursCbnNc3kGzq6AyOTv>